



GUUAM AS PERCEIVED BY THE ELITE AND THE POPULATION OF UKRAINE.

The postponement for an indefinite term of the GUUAM summit three months ago, which triggered growing scepticism in the political beau monde of Ukraine, was caused by a number of objective and subjective reasons we have already highlighted (ZN, #9 of March 3, 2001). The last three months have seen quite complex negotiations, consultations and groping for agreement - on the level of Presidents, Foreign Ministers and national coordinators.

In the long run it was decided that the leaders of 'the great five' would get together on June 6-7 in Yalta. The Presidents will sign a series of documents the principal of which are the GUUAM Charter and the Free Trade Zone Agreement.

There is not much point in trying to predict the results of the upcoming summit as there is not much time left before it begins. Shortly before the Yalta integration story gets under way it would be of interest to analyze what the Ukrainian political elite and the country's population in general think of GUUAM.

From April 20 to May 3, 2001 the Razumkov centre conducted a national sociological survey on GUUAM issues (2 000 respondents were interviewed in all regions of Ukraine). Simultaneously, from April 18 to May 8, 100 experts were interviewed. These were officials for external political issues from the Ukrainian President's Administration, the Foreign Ministry, other ministries and establishments, scientific institutions, independent analytical centres and the leading media.

Today we would like to share with the readers of ZN some of the survey's findings.

GUUAM As Reflected by External Political Priorities

Officially, regional integration within the framework of GUUAM is not one of Ukraine's top priorities. (The same applies in this or that degree to any other member country.) The Ukrainian leadership has repeatedly stated that the country's strategic direction in external politics is cooperation with the European Union, Russia and the USA.

As the diagram shows, this official line is supported by both experts and the population of Ukraine both of which attribute to relations with GUUAM a far from prominent place. However, as regards other external political directions the sympathies of the Ukrainian population and those of the elite are, as is the custom, quite different. Thus, 41.2% of our citizens give priority to contacts with Russia, 32.1% pick the EU, and 6.5% with other CIS countries. 3.9% of those surveyed regard relations with the USA as a priority and as few as 1.8% think so about GUUAM. 47% of experts, in their turn, define cooperation with the EU as the main priority, 29% opt for Russia, 8% for the USA and none (!) thinks of Ukraine's cooperation with other CIS countries as a priority option. As few as 3% have opted for GUUAM. Not much what with the long-awaited summit round the corner, is it?

In other words, even if the population is more oriented towards contacts with its Eastern neighbour while almost half of the national Establishment support the course of Eurointegration, there is unfortunately no difference in views regarding cooperation with GUUAM. I say 'unfortunately' because the 1.8% - 3 % indicator reflects anything but priority...

Out of the 22 countries whose cooperation is most important to Ukraine the population names first of all Russia (81.8%), Germany (60.9%), Belarus (55.5%), the USA (54.1%), Poland (50.4%), Kazakhstan (49.9%), Canada (49.3%), and France (48.4%). The GUUAM countries are but lagging behind the eight front-runners.

The experts' assessment coincides with the population's views if with a somewhat different emphasis: the eight front-runner countries include Turkey instead of Belarus and Great Britain instead of Kazakhstan. The first four countries have got most of the experts' support: Russia - 99%, Germany -98%, and Poland -95%.

Let us get back to GUUAM. The population's and the elite's assessment of this institution's role in Ukraine's external politics are different. The citizens' scepticism is largely accounted for by the fact that they know little about this regional union. Almost two thirds (62.6%) of the surveyed have never heard of GUUAM; those who have but are not aware of its plans and prospects are a third (33.8%) of the questioned and only 3.6% respondents know about GUUAM's aims and plans.

Let us note that the idea of GUUAM and the benefits and prospects of such regional cooperation, if there are any, should be made clear to the people. Unless it gets due publicity, the GUUAM is bound to continue to be seen by Ukrainians as a phantom [institution].

The reserved position taken by the knowledgeable elite (78% of the experts are aware of GUUAM's aims and plans) apparently stems from their clear understanding of the current situation. First, the actual potential of GUUAM member countries is far from high, so it is no use expecting from them in the near future any considerable investments, both foreign and domestic. Secondly, the external political positions of the five countries are quite weak, which is largely a result of their domestic political situations. Thirdly, GUUAM countries have no major influence with international organizations and therefore cannot effectively contribute to promoting Ukraine's international interests.

Some Features of the Group Image.

Over the four years the regional GUUAM project has little by little been transformed from an 'oil project', a mechanism of coordinating positions on flank restrictions and a political counterbalance of the Russian idea of post-Soviet integration -which many analysts noted - into an alliance with the project of the Eurasian transport corridor at its centre. GUUAM is also a sort of a regional backlash for geopolitical maneuvering and an attempt at balancing the Russian influence on the CIS territory.

What is the current GUUAM in the eyes of Ukrainian elite and the country's population? The majority of experts (68%) consider GUUAM an economic alliance of countries around the Asia-Europe transport corridor. The same view -several answers were suggested - is held by a quarter (24.9%) of the population. Half of the experts (50%) are at the same time inclined to believe that the GUUAM is a group of countries that united to counteract the Russian influence on the post-Soviet space. Only one out of six citizens interviewed (16.1%) supports this view.

A considerably smaller number of experts (36%) are convinced that GUUAM is a consultative group of countries set up to jointly resolve specific international issues. This view is supported by one fifth of the population (20.9%). Only 4 % of both experts and the population each are of the opinion that GUUAM is a military political bloc aiming at enhancing contacts with NATO.

In other words, both the general population and the Ukrainian Establishment see GUUAM as a regional business project rather than a sort of military political alliance. Both the former and the latter see the opportunity for the country to get energy supplies as one of the benefits of cooperation within GUUAM framework. The role of the five countries' partnership in reviving the national economy is seen with more reservation.

Indeed, the intensity of Ukraine's trade and economic relations within the bloc still leaves much to be desired: in 2000 the Ukrainian export to GUUAM countries accounted for only 2.5 % of general export. The respective portion of import was 1.8%. In comparison, Ukraine's turnover with its four GUUAM partners is equal to only 70% of its turnover with Belarus or slightly over half of its turnover with Turkmenistan.

What hinders the movement along 'the Silk Way'?

Of interest are the population's and the experts' views of factors standing in the way of increasing integration within GUUAM. The opinions of experts and the lay population are practically identical on the two factors at the top of the list. The majority of experts (59%) put first the unstable internal political situations in GUUAM countries, while the second place (54% of experts) is occupied by such a factor as the low level of the countries' socio-economic development. As evaluated by the population these factors are in reverse order: 47.8% and 28.2% respectively.

Therefore the reasons for the far from impressive pace of the GUUAM group's development should be looked for primarily in Tbilisi, Ashkhabad, Kyiv, Baku and Kishinev rather than in Moscow or Washington.

The rest of the 'braking factors' as seen by experts are as follows: the countries' leaderships' inconsistent positions on integration within GUUAM (53%), Russia's negative position on GUUAM strengthening (47%), differences in external political interests (26%), insufficient support by western countries (14%), Russia's military presence on the territory of GUUAM countries (8%), lack of information for the population regarding the content and prospects of cooperation within GUUAM (8%), different national and cultural traditions (3%).

It's noteworthy that a quarter of our fellow citizens (25.9%) point to the population's being poorly informed about GUUAM as the third factor, the fourth one (22.1%) being the difference in national and cultural traditions. Let us add that the population does not regard Russia's position as a hindrance to GUUAM's development. The experts' apprehensions on this count are not groundless though. It is obvious that as GUUAM continues to shape its policies one should not overlook the interests of Russia as one of the major players in the Black Sea and Caspian region. Simultaneously, it is necessary to establish a stable system of contacts with other international organizations: European, Euroatlantic, and post-Soviet ones. According to expert estimates, the economic potential of the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization or the Russian-Belarus Union is much greater than the



According to expert estimates, the economic potential of the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization or the Russian-Belarus Union is much greater than the potential of the GUUAM. However, the enumerated 'braking factors' of internal and external characters should not question the necessity to accelerate both bilateral and multilateral contacts of all in the sphere of trade and economic cooperation.

The prospects are uncertain, but we need to cooperate.

In spite of a number of serious factors impeding the growth of the five countries' alliance, suggestions are already voiced these days on its expansion. Interestingly, Zbigniew Brzezinski's ideas of Poland, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria joining GUUAM as observers have found a response among Ukrainians. In answer to the question, 'What other countries should be in the GUUAM alliance?' 39% of the interviewed experts mentioned Poland, 34% - Turkey, 21% - Romania, and 21% - Bulgaria. The population of Ukraine has no less interesting proposals. The surveyed citizens believe that GUUAM will not suffer if it is joined by Russia (36.7%), Belarus (21.8%) and Kazakhstan (15.5%). However, no one is queuing to join and the situation is unlikely to change in the near future.

It would be naive to expect from this structure an impressive economic effect or weighty external political dividends soon. Undoubtedly, 'the Silk Way' will not be all cakes and ale and the process of the new regional structure's getting on its feet will take years. Hence the cautious assessment of GUUAM's prospects on part of Ukrainian elite and the population. Thus 73% of experts see those prospects as uncertain, 16% are convinced that the GUUAM stands a real chance of becoming an influential regional organization and 7% are inclined to think that this alliance has no future.

34% of the population, in turn, estimate GUUAM's prospects as uncertain, 18.1% are sure that the bloc has no chance of surviving, and as few as 6.6% believe that the GUUAM will live to become an influential regional structure whereas 40.9% hesitated to answer.

However, in spite of such cautious estimations, the absolute majority (!) of experts (as many as 79%) are convinced that this country needs to enhance contacts within GUUAM. No respondent suggested the country's secession from GUUAM and only 14% of the interviewed believe in the expedience of preserving Ukraine's participation in GUUAM at the present level.

This is quite an important result. Most of the elite who participate in the preparation, adoption, and implementation of state decisions support cooperation within GUUAM.

Moreover, 52% of the surveyed experts believe that it is necessary at the present moment to transform this alliance into an international organization. We, on our part, would take the liberty of questioning the necessity of forcing this process.

Formation of organizational structures should not be an end in itself. Today it is necessary to strengthen cooperation within GUUAM taking utmost advantage of the existing mechanisms and opportunities for greater results of cooperation in all directions, primarily in the economic sphere. Otherwise any political constructions will sag. Hopefully, the negotiations of GUUAM countries' leaders at the Yalta summit will be conducted in this key.

Will the project born four years ago in an autumnal Strasbourg get a new impetus at the summer Black Sea coast? There is no answer yet. Let's wait, it won't be long now...

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